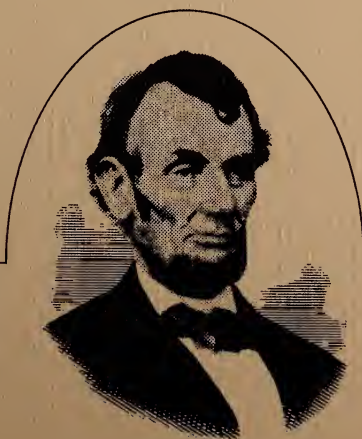


THE MINOR AFFAIR

An Adventure in Forgery and Detection

DON E.
FEHRENBACHER

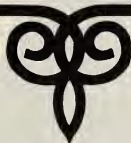
THE SECOND ANNUAL
R. GERALD McMURTRY LECTURE
DELIVERED AT
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA
1979

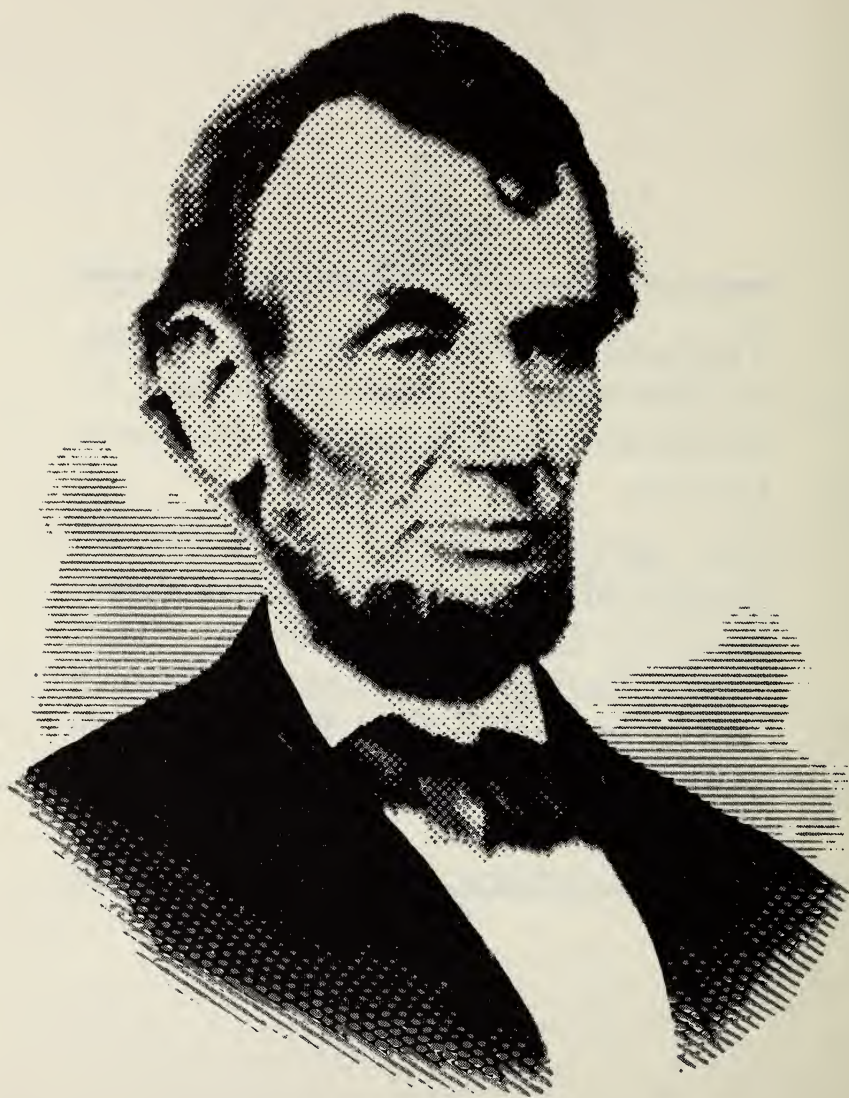




The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum is a memorial tribute to the life and contributions of Abraham Lincoln.

The lecture series honors Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, the second director of the Library and Museum. Each year a distinguished Lincoln scholar will be invited to Fort Wayne to present a paper on some aspect of the Lincoln theme.





THE
MINOR
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An Adventure
in Forgery
and Detection

DON E.
FEHRENBACHER

William Robertson Coe
Professor of History and
American Studies
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Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum
Fort Wayne, Indiana



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The second annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture
was delivered in the Board Room at
The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company
in Fort Wayne, Indiana on May 10, 1979.



DON E. FEHRENBACHER

Don E. Fehrenbacher was born in Sterling, Illinois on August 21, 1920. Service with the United States Air Force in World War II interrupted his college education. He graduated from Cornell College (Iowa) in 1946 and went to the University of Chicago, earning an M.A. there two years later. While working on his doctoral dissertation, he began teaching at Coe College in Iowa. The University of Chicago granted him a Ph.D. in 1951. He continued teaching at Coe until 1953, when he became an assistant professor at Stanford University. He is now William Robertson Coe Professor of History and American Studies at Stanford.

*No one in recent times has had more impact on the modern understanding of Abraham Lincoln than Professor Fehrenbacher. His first book, *Chicago Giant: A Biography of "Long John" Wentworth* (1957), explored Illinois politics. His second, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (1962), placed Lincoln in that political context and arrived at original insights on the Lincoln-Douglas debates which have influenced writing on Lincoln's antislavery views ever since. Familiarity with the sources for Lincoln study led to the publication of *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait Through His Speeches and Writings* (1964) and *The Leadership of Abraham Lincoln* (1970).*

*In 1967-1968 Fehrenbacher was the Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University. His Inaugural Lecture, *The Changing Image of Lincoln in American Historiography* (1968), neatly identified the most important trends in the study of Lincoln's life over the years. Professor Fehrenbacher's most recent book, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (1978), won the Pulitzer Prize for History.*



THE
MINOR
AFFAIR
An Adventure
in Forgery
and Detection

BY
DON E.
FEHRENBACHER



Cast of Principal Characters

(In Order of Appearance)

- Wilma Frances Minor . . . A San Diego newspaper
columnist
- Edward A. Weeks. . . . Editor of the *Atlantic*
Monthly Press
- Ellery Sedgwick Editor of the *Atlantic*
Monthly
- Mrs. Cora DeBoyer . . . Mother of Wilma Frances
Minor
- Teresa Fitzpatrick. . . . Circulation manager of the
Atlantic Monthly
- Theodore Morrison . . . Assistant to Ellery Sedgwick
- William E. Barton. . . . A Congregational minister
and Lincoln biographer
- Worthington
Chauncey Ford. Editor of the Massachusetts
Historical Society
- Ida N. Tarbell. A journalist and Lincoln
biographer
- Herbert Putnam. Librarian of Congress
- Carl Sandburg A poet and Lincoln biographer
- Paul M. Angle Secretary of the Lincoln
Centennial Association
- Oliver R. Barrett A Chicago attorney and
Lincoln collector
- Nelson J. Peabody. . . . Publisher of the *Atlantic*
Monthly
- J. B. Armstrong Head of a Los Angeles
detective agency
- James B. A. Ashe A San Diego publisher
- Scott Greene A son of one of Lincoln's
friends

The 1920's, so well remembered as the age of jazz, flappers, speakeasies, and Coolidge prosperity, were also the heyday of the old-fashioned detective story—I mean the kind of popular fiction in which an amateur sleuth or private investigator solves a puzzling crime (usually a murder) and exposes the guilty person in a dramatic conclusion that satisfies the reader only if it takes him by surprise. It was during the 1920's that Sherlock Holmes made his last authentic appearance in print and that Hercule Poirot, Lord Peter Wimsey, Philo Vance, Ellery Queen, and others arrived on the scene to take his place.¹

One and all, they were heroes notable for their powers of mind. The essential theme of the classic detective story is intellect brought to bear on mystery. Holmes acknowledged having chosen his profession because of a craving for “mental exaltation,” and according to Dr. Watson, he was “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen.” For Poirot, likewise, detection consisted principally of ratiocination—the exercise of those “little grey cells” inside his egg-shaped head. “The power of the human brain,” he told his friend Hastings, “is almost limitless.” Lord Peter and Philo Vance virtually parodied each other as dilettante intellectuals, foppish in manner but with minds like steel traps. Vance in particular was not only insufferably erudite but also interminably precise in demonstrating the logic of detection. At one point in *The Greene Murder Case* (1928), he presented ninety-eight statements of fact which, if arranged in the right order, would lead to the name of the murderer. The detective story in such hands was becoming a stylized contest between author and reader, with certain rules of fair play understood. Ellery Queen, in his early novels, made the contest explicit. Just before each denouement, he interrupted his narrative with a formal “challenge to the reader,” declaring that all the information needed to solve the mystery had now been provided.

Whether viewed as entertainment or as mental exercise, detective fiction was popular among academics,

journalists and other intellectuals, some of whom made their own contributions to the literature. For instance, the Philo Vance books were written by a professional art critic. The Lord Peter Wimsey novels were the work of a woman who took first-class honors in medieval literature at Oxford and published translations and studies of Dante. When British mystery writers founded the Detection Club in 1928, they elected as its first president the inimitable G. K. Chesterton—poet, critic, novelist, and creator of Father Brown. And the man calling himself Nicholas Blake, who began to publish highly literate detective stories in the next decade, was actually Cecil Day Lewis, one of England's leading poets and subsequently Poet Laureate. As for addicted readers of crime fiction, the long list of well-known names includes Woodrow Wilson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, W. Somerset Maugham, W. H. Auden, and Jacques Barzun.

It is not surprising, then, that even the elegant *Atlantic Monthly*, though unwilling to publish detective fiction, should have taken some notice of its mounting popularity—especially among intellectuals. The *Atlantic* for April 1929 carried an article titled “The Professor and the Detective,” in which the author, Marjorie Nicolson of Smith College, argued that scholars and detectives were very much alike. “After all,” she wrote, “what essential difference is there between the technique of the detective tracking his quarry . . . and that of the historian tracking his fact, the philosopher his idea, down the ages?” Thus the professor reading a mystery novel was not indulging in escape but rather “carrying over to another medium the fun of the chase, the ardor of the pursuit, which makes his life a long and eager and active quest.”²

At that very time, as it happened, the *Atlantic* was involved in a real-life mystery of its own—not murder, to be sure, but forgery, which is the scholarly equivalent of murder. The editor and his staff, together with various professional experts, private detectives, and amateur sleuths from New England to California, were all caught

up in the excitement of a case that frequently made newspaper headlines. At issue was the authenticity of certain documents recently published by the *Atlantic*—documents that ostensibly confirmed, once and for all, the shadowy, tragic romance between Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge.

After several months of public controversy, the magazine more or less acknowledged its error by printing a historian's critical review in which he labeled the documents spurious. This critique appeared in the *Atlantic* for April 1929, along with the Nicolson essay on scholars and detective stories. It remains almost the last word on the subject and has come to be regarded as a classic exercise in historical detection. Yet the critique, because it concentrated on testing for authenticity, necessarily left much of the story untold and part of the mystery unsolved. For one thing, no culprit was identified, and everyone addicted to detective fiction knows that the ultimate question in any mystery is always: "Who done it?" Fifty years after the event seems an appropriate time to look once again at what might be called "The Case of the Dubious Love Letters."

Ann Rutledge, according to the full-blown legend, was Lincoln's first and only true love, forever closest to his heart. Her death in 1835 filled him with youthful despair verging on madness and drove him into the political career that made him ready, when the time came, to save the American nation. Thus, in the poem by Edgar Lee Masters, she lays claim to a place in history, exclaiming: "Bloom forever, O Republic,/ From the dust of my bosom!"

In the 1920's, this luxuriant sentimentalism found more favor with the general public than it did with Lincoln scholars, some of whom were disposed, not to reject the legend outright, but at least to prune it severely. The whole story, after all, rested entirely on reminiscences gathered after Lincoln's death by his law partner, William H. Herndon. It had no basis in contemporary records, no documentary existence as a

historical event. Such was the uncertain status of the Ann Rutledge legend in late June or early July 1928, when the *Atlantic Monthly* received its first letter from Wilma Frances Minor of San Diego, California.

Miss Minor reported that she had just finished writing the "true love story" of Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, basing it upon their original letters to each other and related manuscript materials, all of which had been handed down in her mother's family. The question was, would such a book be eligible for the non-fiction prize of \$5,000 offered biennially by the Atlantic Monthly Press? "Harper's," she confided, "have been very anxious to get it and have sent several long telegrams and were just wonderful, but I know a prize book gets such wide acclaim and the material is worthy of the best."³

The letter caused a stir in the sedate *Atlantic* offices on Arlington Street, across from the Boston Public Garden. Edward A. Weeks, then newly in charge of book publication, read it first and headed straight for a conference with the *Atlantic's* editor and owner, Ellery Sedgwick. Both men were somewhat skeptical but at the same time eager to learn more about the possibly precious documents in Miss Minor's possession. She was immediately informed by telegram that her book would be a welcome entry in the prize contest. Sedgwick himself took over the subsequent correspondence.⁴

Ellery Sedgwick was a short, heavyset man of fifty-six years with strong features and a forceful manner. One of his fellow editors said that he looked like a prosperous merchant but sounded like a professor of English. Descended from old Massachusetts stock, educated at Groton and Harvard, married to a Cabot, he embodied New England's genteel tradition on its cosmopolitan and liberal side. In his twenty years as editor, he had raised the *Atlantic Monthly* to a new level of prestige by making it, more than ever before, a magazine of affairs as well as literature, thereby broadening without diluting its candidly elitist appeal. The *Atlantic's* prin-

cial function was, as he put it, "to inoculate the few who influence the many."⁵ Nearly every issue of the magazine somehow reflected Sedgwick's enormous range of interest and his lively curiosity about the human condition in its countless variations. He was, above all, a journalist, with a keen eye for news material and a willingness to take editorial risks. An editor, Sedgwick declared, should have an open mind, always steering closer to credulity than to skepticism. In any encounter with improbability, he should "put on the brakes gently but let the motor run."⁶

Negotiations with Wilma Frances Minor proceeded briskly during the summer and early fall of 1928. She mailed her manuscript of 227 typewritten pages to the *Atlantic*, enclosing photostats of some of the documents. Sedgwick decided that he and his staff must see what kind of person they were dealing with. Miss Minor was accordingly invited to visit Boston as the *Atlantic's* guest. She happily agreed, telling him that he was "just darling to be so considerate," and adding that her "gifted mother" would make the journey too at her own expense.⁷

It was early September when Miss Minor arrived, accompanied not only by her mother, Mrs. Cora De-Boyer, but also by her sister, a twelve-year-old named Clover. They stopped briefly in New York, where a representative of the *Atlantic* met their train, lodged them at the Commodore Hotel, and provided tickets to one of the season's hit plays, "The Front Page." In Boston, where they were put up at the Ritz, the entertainment included a tour of Concord. Edward Weeks remembers that the three of them seemed completely uninterested in literary history but "stowed away a big tea at the Concord Inn." The mother, according to Weeks, was tall and beady-eyed, with hair suspiciously black for her age. She reminded him somehow of a fortune-teller. Wilma, on the other hand, proved to be a handsome woman with a curvaceous figure, seductive gray-green eyes, and an appealingly ingenuous manner. She and Sedgwick took to each other at once. "Isn't it



strange," he wrote to her some days later, "that sometimes one feels as though they have known a person a long time, although their hours together may have been very brief?"⁸

But Miss Minor's personal charm only heightened the enthusiasm with which Sedgwick contemplated the manuscript treasure that she was offering the *Atlantic*. There were ten letters written by Lincoln, including three to Ann Rutledge and four to John Calhoun, a local Democratic politician who appointed Lincoln deputy surveyor of Sangamon County in 1833. There were four letters from the pen of Ann Rutledge, including two to Lincoln (Nothing written by Ann had ever previously been discovered.). There were several pages from the diary of Matilda ("Mat") Cameron, Ann's cousin and bosom friend. There was a memorandum about Lincoln written in 1848 by Calhoun's daughter Sally. There were four books bearing Lincoln's signature and annotations. And there were letters verifying the provenance of the collection, which had passed through a number of hands to Wilma's great-uncle, Frederick W. Hirth of Emporia, Kansas, and then to her mother, Mrs. DeBoyer.⁹

The collection, if authentic, did more than confirm the betrothal of Lincoln and Ann Rutledge. It also reinforced the larger legend that she was the primary inspiration of his career. Here is Lincoln writing to Calhoun in 1848, some thirteen years after Ann's death and during the sixth year of his marriage to Mary Todd: "Like a ray of sun-shine and as brief—she flooded my life, and at times like today when I traverse past paths I see this picture before me—fever burning the light from her dear eyes, urging me to *fight* for the right. . . . I have *kept faith*. Sometimes I feel that in Heaven she is pleading for my furtherance."¹⁰

In conferences extending over several days, it was decided that Miss Minor's story of "Lincoln the Lover" should be remodeled into a three-part series for the *Atlantic*, then expanded into a book. She would receive

\$500 for each of the articles and an advance of \$1,000 on the book, with another \$4,000 to be paid on publication. There was also discussion of converting the story into a play and motion picture. These arrangements were contingent, of course, upon proof of the collection's authenticity, and Miss Minor agreed that it must be submitted to appropriate tests. Soon after her return home, she sent all of the original manuscripts to Boston by express. She also informed a delighted Sedgwick that he was to have his choice of one of the Lincoln letters.¹¹

The continuing flow of correspondence between San Diego and Boston reveals much of what is known about Wilma Frances Minor. Besides writing frequently to Sedgwick, she exchanged cordial letters with Teresa Fitzpatrick, the short, energetic woman who presided over the *Atlantic's* circulation department. Miss Fitzpatrick signed herself "Affectionately yours." Wilma addressed her as "Dear little friend" and declared: "I feel I can come to you with problems and joys as I would to a much loved sister."¹²

In what may have been an overstatement aimed at arousing sympathy, Wilma later declared that she had had "a desperately hard and bitter life."¹³ Of her earlier history there are but few traces, and she herself was reticent about certain details—refusing, for instance, to give her date of birth, and withholding the fact that she was married until it could no longer be concealed. Born in Los Angeles and sent to a convent school, she had apparently lived in various parts of the country, including Florida and Kansas. She had been an actress in a touring company, and there are indications that she had tried her hand at dress-designing and at writing scenarios for motion pictures.¹⁴

More recently, however, she had become a part-time reporter and columnist for the San Diego *Union*. Her column, "Sidelights on Life," usually appeared in the Sunday women's section and featured a profile of a local writer, artist, or other minor celebrity. Among her subjects in 1928 were: Mrs. J. C. Hawkesworth, an eighty-

six-year-old painter whose eyes were "round and merry and bright with the light of many dreams"; Der Ling, a visiting Manchu princess; Mrs. Francis M. Hinkle, author of "Wild Ginger," a narrative poem about army life in Honolulu; Elizabeth Beachley, author of *Hip Shot Forest*, a book "so full of fresh air and high zest of living that it plays on jaded senses pleasantly like the muted strings of a violin"; and Belle Willey Gue, author of a drama in blank verse titled *Washington the Statesman*, a work of "exquisite beauty" which in addition had "all the sustained interest of a high class thrilling novel." It was Ellen Beach Taw who inspired the highest praise, however. "Against the odds of ill-health, a dependent family, and lacking influence," Wilma wrote, "this dauntless young soul, nevertheless, forged a brilliant career . . . and is today one of the foremost singers on the concert stage."¹⁵

That was how Wilma Frances Minor also saw herself—as a dauntless young soul struggling against formidable odds to win recognition in her chosen career. Romance suffused her outlook. "I read fairy tales and believed them long past the age of most children," she recalled.¹⁶ But in maturity it was to the American myth of success that she clung most tenaciously. Several years of interviewing successful people and writing about them had sharpened her own hunger for success. All the more keenly, perhaps, because of her desultory, marginal life, she yearned to be somebody important. Wilma's model of a successful woman was the English novelist Marie Corelli, whose melodramatic plots and overblown style made her, for nearly thirty years, a laughingstock among critics and the best-selling writer in the world.¹⁷ According to Wilma, Corelli had addressed her in correspondence as "My dear protégé" and had encouraged her ambition to become known as "the American Corelli." The exchange of letters had presumably taken place shortly before Marie Corelli's death in 1924.¹⁸

In her Lincoln manuscript, Wilma tried very hard to write like Corelli. For example, this is how she said

that it was getting dark: "Night, like a black sinewy panther, crawled cautiously through the unbending straight directness of the saplings on the river bank." And this is her picture of Lincoln leaving New Salem: "Thus he rides with bent head and eyes full of pathetic suffering out of his garden of Gethsemane toward Springfield . . . Here we will leave him thorn-torn and scarred . . ." For the *Atlantic*, such prose would never do, and so Sedgwick's assistant, Theodore Morrison, in the process of shaping the manuscript into three installments, virtually rewrote it sentence by sentence.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Sedgwick had taken up the task of verifying the authenticity of the Minor documents. Early in September, he consulted the Reverend William E. Barton, an energetic, self-important man of sixty-seven years who regarded himself (not without some justification) as the foremost living authority on Lincoln. Although his books tended to be superficial, discursive, and tediously detailed, Barton had few peers as a historical detective. "He is such a blood-hound after the facts," said one reviewer.²⁰ Visiting Sedgwick's office, Barton looked briefly at the Minor photostats but reserved judgment until he could see the original documents. He left Boston before the originals arrived from California, however, and never did get a chance to inspect them. Barton found the pedigree of the collection "remarkably consistent and satisfactory." But the collection itself, he warned Sedgwick, was suspiciously high in its yield of important historical data and suspiciously pat in its accord with popular tradition. In short, it seemed too good to be true. Sedgwick, however, was already bracing himself against negative evaluations. "I want the material fairly judged," he wrote Barton on September 10. "I think the tendency of 'experts' would be to cast discredit on the possibility of finding important new material."²¹

Sedgwick also showed the photostats to Worthington Chauncey Ford, the peppery seventy-year-old editor of the Massachusetts Historical Society, who had recently prepared Albert J. Beveridge's unfinished biography

of Lincoln for posthumous publication. Ford without hesitation pronounced the collection spurious. The letters supposedly written by Lincoln, he said, bore no resemblance to Lincoln's handwriting. Sedgwick's response was to mark Ford down as biased and consult him no more. Thus Ford, like Barton, never saw the original documents²²

The originals arrived from Miss Minor in several shipments, beginning on September 21, and they swept away any remaining doubts that Sedgwick may have had. To Barton, who was teaching the autumn semester at Vanderbilt University, he subsequently wrote: "There are so many documents in the complete collection and their source is so varied and their evidence so interlocking that a hoax is not, I think, within the realm of possibility. . . . I am sure we should have your blessing on our venture were you here."²³

With Barton not available, Sedgwick sought the help of Ida N. Tarbell, the famous muckraking journalist, business historian, and Lincoln biographer. Miss Tarbell, whose writings on Lincoln dated back to the 1890's, entertained a deep affection for the Ann Rutledge legend, although she had toned the story down somewhat in her most recent book²⁴ Sedgwick called on her in New York, and they spent at least several hours going over the documents. Immediately afterward he wrote: "She feels not only the same confidence that I do, but is joyful because the contention in which she has always believed seems now proved to the hilt." In a telegram and a letter, both dated October 19, Miss Tarbell expressed reservations on a few specific points but came down firmly on the positive side. "My faith is strong," she declared, "that you have an amazing set of true Lincoln documents—the most extraordinary that have come to us in many, many years."²⁵ The decisive influence of her endorsement is revealed in the minutes of an *Atlantic* staff meeting held on October 19: "As Miss Tarbell's comments, after the study of the new Lincoln material, were favorable, Mr. Sedgwick feels

justified in going ahead with the magazine articles and with the book."

Certain other developments also affected Sedgwick's decision. A well-known commercial chemist, after examining some of the Minor documents, reported that their paper was appropriately of rag content, with no sign of telltale wood pulp, and that the appearance of the ink was consistent with its supposed age. In addition, the *Atlantic* received letters from several persons who had known Frederick Hirth and remembered hearing him mention Lincoln letters in his possession. And Sedgwick's confidence was further reinforced when Herbert Putnam of the Library of Congress expressed a willingness to arrange a public exhibition of the collection.²⁶

Still, Sedgwick acted with extraordinary haste, making the decision in favor of publication just four weeks after the original documents began to arrive. During that time, the originals had been shown to only one Lincoln scholar, and only part of the collection had been subjected to chemical analysis. He had not sought the advice of any handwriting experts or manuscript dealers. Furthermore, he was deliberately ignoring the doubts expressed by Barton and the negative verdict so emphatically rendered by Ford.

Why did this veteran editor choose to forgo additional precautions and rush the Minor articles into print? For one thing, his emotional commitment to the project had warped his judgment. But in addition, as a good businessman, he wanted to use the series for promotion of subscription sales during the holiday season. The *Atlantic* accordingly launched an extensive advertising program to announce the forthcoming publication. "At last," it declared, "after nearly a century during which their existence was always suspected and hoped for, appear the priceless documents which lift the veil shrouding the love affair between Abraham Lincoln and young Ann Rutledge.... This feature alone, the first printing of these documents, will make an *Atlantic* subscription for the coming year a life-long keepsake—



THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

has the great honor to announce the publication of the

Original Love Letters

which passed between

Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge

AT last, after nearly a century during which their existence was always suspected and hoped for, appear the priceless documents which lift the veil shrouding the love affair between Abraham Lincoln and young Ann Rutledge.

No longer need the biographer spend years of research, or the romancer dream of the idyll as it might have been. Here, for the first time, is revealed in Lincoln's own words, the tender love he bore for his "Dearlly Valued Ann."

To the *Atlantic's* care has been confided the invaluable package inherited by Miss Wilma Frances Minor. Here are Lincoln's letters to Ann, and Ann's to Lincoln; letters from Lincoln to his friend and benefactor, John Calhoun; letters from the twenty-year old Ann to her cousin Mathilda Cameron, describing Lincoln's wooing ("he talks to me just like poetry," wrote the gentle, untutored girl); Mathilda's simply written revealing diary; the Bible Ann gave to Abraham; the little book of rhetoric with characteristic marginalia, which was the young Abe's daily companion through the days when he lived out the idyll of New Salem.

To those already privileged to see this collection, these documents seem the most moving personal mementoes in our history. Their deposit in the Treasure Room of the Congressional Library in Washington has been invited by the librarian.

Our first question, like the reader's, was,

of course, But, can this be *true*? Where have these letters been hidden all these years? When Lincoln scholars, students, lovers of his name, have eagerly searched for the proofs of this romance just hinted at in a few casual references and meager records of a scattered group of places and people, why have they not been discovered and given to the world before?

If there is one life of which the American people wish to know everything, it is Lincoln's, and his is the one life about which it long ago seemed impossible to unearth any new material.

And what have Lincoln scholars to say about this find? The leading Lincoln biographers and the country's most distinguished chemist who scrutinized the paper to determine if it were authentically of the period,—do they all accept these documents as the living record of the fragrant romance?

The answer to every question will be published in detail in the *Atlantic Monthly* beginning in December.

Miss Minor's story, with all its wealth of original, invaluable and long-sought Lincoln material, will begin in that issue. This feature alone, the first printing of these documents, will make an *Atlantic* subscription for the coming year a life-long keepsake—and incidentally a most appropriate Christmas remembrance.

The Lincoln story will be surrounded by an editorial program of true *Atlantic Monthly* standard.

The Lincoln serial will begin in the December *Atlantic Monthly*

and incidentally a most appropriate Christmas remembrance."²⁷

Meanwhile, Dr. Barton was making a trip to California, and on November 12, by prior arrangement, he met Miss Minor for an hour in the Los Angeles train station. Each found the other charming. Barton welcomed her to the fellowship of Lincoln writers and said nothing about the doubts he had expressed to Sedgwick. He also invited her to visit him at his summer home in Massachusetts. Wilma, in turn, told him how much she had relied upon his books and presented him inscribed photostats of some of her Lincoln letters. A lonely man since the death of his wife three years earlier, Barton scribbled an affectionate note to Wilma soon after boarding the eastbound Sunset Limited. "What a lively little adventure we had," he exclaimed. "It was very pleasant to meet you as the train pulled in this morning and to have an hour's visit and to learn all the interesting news you had to tell me! And you are going to write me ever so many love-letters and I shall inlay them in your book later. And when you are in Boston in the summer you are to call me up at Foxboro, only 25 miles out, and come and sleep under my pines and see my Lincoln material and swim in my little lake. Tell your mother I made love to you and hope to do it again. And write me very soon and often . . ." ²⁸

In spite of this foolishness, Barton was no fool where Lincoln documents were concerned. It appears that on the trip back to Nashville, he made a careful study of the photostats given him by Miss Minor and concluded that the letters were spurious. Yet, in writing to Sedgwick on November 15, he continued to balance his misgivings with a cordial hope that the collection would prove to be authentic.²⁹

The latter part of November was a time of golden fulfillment for Wilma Frances Minor. She began to receive speaking invitations. The San Diego branch of the League of American Penwomen elected her to membership and honored her at a meeting. Collectors and dealers

began to inquire about sale of the Lincoln documents. They would command a "vast sum" at public auction, said one New York firm. Sedgwick agreed to act as her exclusive agent in such matters, and she told him that he was "perfectly adorable" to do so. Then, on November 26, she received the December *Atlantic* with the first installment of "Lincoln the Lover." The layout was attractive, for the magazine had waived its rule against illustrations and printed facsimiles of several documents. Wilma promptly telegraphed Sedgwick: "Just read the December *Atlantic*. I am thrilled over the splendid arrangement of my material and your fine editorial touch. Your added features make it perfect. A thousand thanks for everything. You are a darling."³⁰

The first storm signal came from Worthington Ford. He prepared a press release denouncing the Minor documents and sent a copy to Sedgwick, who offered to publish it in the *Atlantic* as a letter to the editor. Ford refused, wanting to make his views public without delay. "Have you gone insane or have I?" he demanded. "You are putting over one of the crudest forgeries I have known." Sedgwick replied that such impetuous behavior did not become a "sober historian."³¹

Ford's continuing hostility was offset by the recruitment of Carl Sandburg to the ranks of believers. The Illinois poet, whose *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* had appeared in 1926, visited Sedgwick's home as a Thanksgiving guest and spent several hours poring over the Minor documents. "These new Lincoln letters," he declared, "seem entirely authentic—and preciously and wonderfully co-ordinate and chime with all else known of Lincoln."³²

By this time, however, other voices were speaking from Illinois—most notably, Paul M. Angle, secretary of the Lincoln Centennial Association in Springfield, and Oliver R. Barrett, a Chicago attorney who was also the country's leading private collector of Lincoln manuscripts. Angle, at twenty-eight, had already established himself as an authority in the Lincoln field. He was

An Unparalleled Lincoln Discovery

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

DECEMBER



1928

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bright, ambitious, and unwilling to tolerate pretense or pretentiousness. In the words of Earl Schenck Miers, he had a mind that could not "be budged one inch beyond its own scrupulous standards."³³ A year earlier, Angle had published an article casting doubt on the Ann Rutledge legend. Now he became the first critic to say publicly that the Lincoln letters in the *Atlantic* were forgeries. His statement appeared in the *Illinois State Journal* and a few other newspapers on November 27, but its distribution elsewhere was temporarily held up by the Associated Press for fear of a libel suit. Angle also printed his charges in a special bulletin of the Centennial Association and sent a copy to Sedgwick. "It's the biggest thing that ever happened to me," he exulted in a letter to his parents. "One doesn't get a chance very often to put the magazine of the country in the frying pan and cook it brown."³⁴

Barrett likewise drafted a statement for the press. The Minor letters, he declared, were not Lincoln's, either in their handwriting or their composition. Then he added, in what proved to be a remarkably appropriate simile: "Coming as it does, the 'message' from Lincoln produced by the *Atlantic* is very much like the messages drawn from the spirit world by the intervention of 'mediums'."³⁵

Ford's pronouncement, released on November 30, was printed in the *New York Times* on December 2, and the statements of Angle and Barrett appeared the following day. The chorus of criticism had meanwhile been swelled by various scholars, collectors, and handwriting experts—including Georgia L. Osborne, secretary of the Illinois State Historical Society; Louis A. Warren, director of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation in Fort Wayne, Indiana; and William H. Townsend, an authority on Lincoln's Kentucky background.³⁶

The case for forgery rested first of all on the assertion that the handwriting of the two Lincoln letters reproduced in the December *Atlantic* bore no resemblance to

authenticated Lincoln letters of the same period. "A novice would have no difficulty distinguishing the difference," said one well-known collector.³⁷ At the same time, there was a suspicious similarity between the Lincoln letters and the handwriting in a memorandum supposedly written by Sally Calhoun. Both Warren and Barrett insisted that all three documents had been written by the same person. The punctuation and phrasing of the two Lincoln letters were uncharacteristic in many respects, and they contained several factual discrepancies, such as locating Mary Lincoln in Washington at a time when she was almost certainly in Kentucky.³⁸

Sedgwick replied that critics ought to defer final judgment until the entire series had been publicly exhibited. He named Barton, Tarbell, Putnam, and Sandburg as persons who believed the collection to be authentic.³⁹ Sandburg provided welcome reinforcement on December 4 in an article published under his by-line by the *New York World*. "While this is a case where no one can prove the documents to be absolutely authentic," he declared, "anyone who tries to impeach them and throw them out of the record will have difficulties and end in disaster. They have come to stay in the Lincoln record."

Just one day later, however, Sandburg was in full retreat, bowing to the superior authority of Barrett and Angle (whom he called "formidable sleuths") and acknowledging that the *Atlantic* documents were probably a hoax. He went on to explain rather lamely: "When I scrutinize original source material of this kind I let my emotions have full play. I try to do my hard-boiled analyzing later." Miss Tarbell too began to retreat, denying somewhat untruthfully that she had ever vouched for the authenticity of the documents. And Herbert Putnam protested that he had never "formed, much less ventured, any opinion whatever in the matter."⁴⁰

For Barton, the situation had become highly embarrassing. He could no longer hope to preserve both his warm relationship with Miss Minor and his reputation as a

Lincoln scholar. On December 5, he wrote a note to the *Atlantic* declaring that the Lincoln letters were forgeries, and he said the same thing in an interview with a Boston *Herald* reporter on December 9. "I confess I am not happy," he sighed, "when I think what Miss Minor is likely to say when she learns that I have deserted her." Not until December 11 did Barton work up enough courage for a letter to California, but then he wrote with brutal frankness and sent a copy to Sedgwick. "I have come to the conviction," he said, "that the letters which you are sending to the *Atlantic* . . . are not genuine. And, my dear, I am afraid you know it. I could omit this last sentence, but it is right that I should be utterly honest with you. I am very sorry, very sorry."⁴¹

This communication reached Boston first and caused an uproar in the *Atlantic's* offices. Sedgwick, in acknowledging it, used the phrase "defamation of character." Miss Fitzpatrick telegraphed Wilma, warning her of what Barton's letter contained and urging her to seek legal advice. Wilma received the "dastardly document" on December 17 and immediately fired off an indignant letter, the first of several in which she demanded a retraction, threatened a lawsuit, and reminded Barton of his calling. "What sort of Christianity do you follow," she asked, "that makes you use such methods to undermine a sincere and stainless charactered girl?" Eventually, in desperation, she showed her claws to their full length by writing: "And then there is the very amorous effusion that you dashed off to me after our meeting. I think you will remember it as the one you wrote on the train. I am strongly advised to give it to the Associated Press, and if you persist in this public tirade that is utterly lacking in real foundation, I must in turn be forced to humiliate you by broadcasting that letter, and if your mind serves you well you will remember that each passage when viewed by a coldly critical, dispassionate world will brand the Reverend Barton as a silly old sheik." Barton refused to be intimidated, however, and Wilma made no move to carry out either of her threats.⁴²

By mid-December it was plain that Sedgwick had no support whatever among Lincoln scholars and other experts. Yet he clung stubbornly to his faith in the authenticity of the Minor documents. "We must remember," he wrote bravely to Wilma, "that the greater the excitement now, the greater will be the triumph of the book if we can compel the acquiescence of leading critics." Wilma echoed his determination in her own peculiar literary style. "Let us gird our armor and fight our way through to victory," she replied.⁴³

On about December 10, proof sheets of the second installment of "Lincoln the Lover" came off the press, and a set of them, obtained from Sandburg, circulated quietly among Barrett, Angle, and Ford. At Angle's suggestion, the three men prepared a joint statement for release as soon as the January issue appeared. The *Boston Herald* and the *New York Times* printed it on December 23.⁴⁴

The second installment, titled "The Courtship," was richly documented. It contained one or more letters from Lincoln to Ann Rutledge, from Ann to Lincoln, from Ann to her cousin Mat Cameron, and from Lincoln to John Calhoun, together with excerpts from Mat's diary and passages from the memorandum of Sally Calhoun. When the three sharpshooters opened fire, these documents proved to be pitifully vulnerable. The Cameron family Bible indicated that Matilda (Mat) Cameron never existed. The same was probably true of Sally Calhoun. Mat's diary, supposedly written in the early 1830's, mentioned Martha Calhoun, who was not born until 1843. Mat wrote twice of the "boat from Springfield" as though speaking of a regular service, but the Sangamon was only rarely navigable by boats of any considerable size, and besides, Springfield was six miles from the river. Ann at one point mentioned Spencer's copybook, which did not appear in print until thirteen years after her death. Lincoln, writing to John Calhoun at a time when both men were publicly employed as surveyors, referred to a controversy over "Section 40," but in the land survey system, sections

were numbered no higher than 36. And, in the same letter, Lincoln spoke of a family as leaving "for some place in Kansas"—this at a time when the region was not called Kansas and was not yet open to white settlement.⁴⁵

It was a devastating attack, and Sedgwick may have been tempted to follow the advice given him earlier in the month by the Librarian of Brown University: "Better eat your peck of dirt now before it becomes a bushel."⁴⁶ Instead, he publicly reaffirmed his confidence in the Minor collection, insisting that "noted experts" had studied the material and pronounced it authentic. But at the same time, his letters to California sounded weary and discouraged. "Our own efforts seem to have come up against a stone wall," he admitted. "It is useless to disguise the fact that we are confronting very serious evidence."⁴⁷ Wilma responded by continuing to play the undaunted heroine. "Situation gives no cause for alarm," she telegraphed on December 26, and, in a letter the next day, she declared: "The objectionists die hard, they are now jumping at and clinging to, flimsy straws, but the more they bark the more optimistic I become." On January 2, she issued a lengthy defense which appeared in a number of newspapers across the country. Most of it, however, was an elaboration of the history of the collection. She said little in direct response to the Angle-Barrett-Ford attack.⁴⁸

Early in January, an exhausted Sedgwick set out for Arizona to get a little rest and spend some time with his invalid son. He did not intend to visit Miss Minor in San Diego, but a rush of events soon altered his plans. Certain members of the *Atlantic* staff were already beginning to take matters into their own hands. Nelson J. Peabody, the magazine's business manager, quietly hired the J. B. Armstrong Detective Agency in Los Angeles to investigate Wilma Frances Minor. And Teresa Fitzpatrick arranged for an examination of the Minor collection by William E. Hingston, a well-known handwriting expert, who reported back that the documents were forgeries.⁴⁹

Before receiving the Hingston report, Miss Fitzpatrick had telegraphed Wilma, urging her to announce initiation of a lawsuit against Barton. The handwritten reply, dated January 2, 1929, came from Cora DeBoyer, who said that her daughter's health could not stand such an ordeal. "She is a very high strung and super-sensitive girl who does not seem to understand how to cope with the rebuffs of this crass world," Mrs. DeBoyer explained. "I think it best that we do not complicate things for her by an added burden." But the members of the *Atlantic* staff were less interested in the content of the letter than in its script. There, they agreed in an exciting moment of revelation, was the hand that had forged the Minor collection! Telephoning Peabody, then in Chicago on magazine business, they found that he had reached the same conclusion from information supplied by the detective agency.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Angle had been pursuing his own investigation and was now convinced that "either Miss Minor or her mother" had fabricated the documents. Through an intermediary, he suggested that the *Atlantic* and its chief critics work together toward a solution. Sedgwick, consulted by telegram, gladly agreed. Peabody accordingly conferred with Angle in Springfield and then headed west to join Sedgwick in a showdown with Wilma and her mother.⁵¹ By this time, a good deal of information about the two women had been gathered, and it did not inspire confidence in their reliability. Both had given false information on wedding licenses, for instance. Wilma was actually forty-two, some ten years older than she pretended to be. She had been married twice and seemed unsure of the name of her father. Cora DeBoyer, according to the detective reports, had had at least five marriages and some interim cohabitation besides. In Emporia, Kansas, Cora's hometown, both she and her daughter were remembered as a little too bold and pleasure-loving to be entirely respectable. One person who knew them well said that Cora was a very clever woman, much more capable than Wilma of planning and executing such a forgery.⁵²

The confrontation took place at a hotel in Los Angeles on the weekend of January 19-20. Sedgwick revealed to Wilma and her mother what had been learned about their background and then accused Mrs. DeBoyer of fabricating the collection. The two women, though frightened by the investigation of their past, emphatically denied his charge and could not be coaxed or driven into a confession. At last it was agreed to issue a joint statement withdrawing the Minor series from further publication—that is, cancelling plans to expand the articles into a book. Sedgwick for the first time acknowledged publicly that the documents lacked authenticity. He promised to continue his search for the truth and make a “full presentation” at the “earliest possible moment.”⁵³

On his trip back to Boston, Sedgwick stopped off in Chicago for a conference with Barrett and Angle. By then, the final installment of “Lincoln the Lover” was out in the February *Atlantic*. Along with it, sarcastically presented in the Contributors’ Column, was the jubilant letter from Angle to his parents—the one in which he had spoken of putting the magazine into a frying pan and cooking it brown. The letter had been brought to Sedgwick’s attention after it appeared in a local newspaper, and the decision to print it had been made several weeks before Angle and the *Atlantic* staff reached their agreement to work together. Publication of the letter, which gave the impression that he was interested primarily in self-advertisement, embarrassed Angle so much that he submitted his resignation as secretary of the Lincoln Centennial Association. To his relief, it was not accepted.⁵⁴

The atmosphere was consequently less than cordial when Sedgwick met Angle, Barrett, and several other Illinoisans at the Union League Club in Chicago on January 26. But after a full day of discussion and an exchange of apologies, it was agreed that Angle should write a critique of the Minor collection for publication in the *Atlantic*. Working swiftly, he finished in thirteen days an article that effectively summarized the evidence

against the authenticity of the collection. It appeared in the April issue and marked the end of public discussion of the affair.⁵⁵

In the meantime, a reproachful Miss Minor had been bombarding Sedgwick with demands for the return of her documents. They were now regarded as legal evidence of fraud, however, and he refused to comply.⁵⁶ The investigations of the Armstrong Detective Agency continued, with Armstrong himself working to the point of exhaustion on the case.⁵⁷ Then, in April, another piece of the puzzle fell into place.

The new information came from James B. A. Ashe, head of a publishing company in San Diego. Early in 1928, he declared, Miss Minor had come into his office a number of times, usually to arrange interviews with his authors. She never mentioned an interest in Lincoln until she interviewed Scott Greene, a son of one of Lincoln's New Salem friends, who was spending the winter in San Diego. Then she reported in great excitement that Greene had letters of Lincoln and Ann Rutledge in his possession, and that she hoped to buy them from him. Later, after several more visits with Greene, she told Ashe that she had gotten all she wanted from the old man. It was Ashe who first suggested that her manuscript be submitted to the *Atlantic*. Assuming all along that she had obtained the documents from Greene, he was astonished to read the story of how they had been handed down in her own family.⁵⁸

On the same day that Ashe first communicated with the *Atlantic* about his suspicions, the Harvard *Crimson* published a long article purporting to show by handwriting analysis that all the documents reproduced in the Minor series were the work of Wilma Frances Minor herself.⁵⁹ Peabody decided that the time had come for another confrontation and ordered Armstrong to San Diego. On April 3, accordingly, the detective interviewed Wilma and her mother in his hotel suite, with two agents listening from the adjoining room by means of a dictaphone. After he summarized the im-

posing evidence against the Lincoln documents, the two women acknowledged that they had somehow been "deceived" but denied any complicity in the forgery. Upon the advice of an attorney hastily brought in by Cora DeBoyer's husband, the women also refused to sign the legal release that Armstrong laid before them. "The old woman is the hard nut of the two," Armstrong reported. "... she is a hard boiled old hen, who does not know what the word truth means. The other one was very badly disrupted and plainly showed the ordeal she had been through." Indeed, at one point in the interview, Wilma seemed "about ready to pass out."⁶⁰

By this time, two somewhat different strategies had taken shape in the *Atlantic* offices on Arlington Street. Peabody and the company's lawyers were interested primarily in getting legal releases, recovering the \$1,000 advance, and closing the entire affair as quickly as possible. Members of the editorial staff, on the other hand, wanted to learn the whole truth about the forgery and report it to the magazine's readers, just as Sedgwick had promised. In pursuit of the truth, Weeks traveled to Springfield, Illinois, for a visit with Scott Greene at the end of April. What he learned there strengthened the suspicion, first awakened by James Ashe, that the forgeries had been inspired by Miss Minor's interview with Greene in February 1928. Also, investigation by Angle and others had disclosed a striking resemblance between some parts of the Minor documents and certain passages in Barton's *Life of Lincoln*.⁶¹

The assembled evidence now seemed overwhelming, and it added up, not only to a solution of the mystery, but also to a story with a lively plot and some interesting characters, eminently suitable for publication in the *Atlantic*. The writing of the story was assigned to Theodore Morrison, and during May he turned out an article of twenty-two typewritten pages—offered, as he put it, so that the *Atlantic's* readers could "share in the fascination of the chase." Morrison opened his account with a flat accusation: "On a day not far from February 12, 1928, two women in San Diego, California,

began to prepare an elaborate series of books, diaries, and letters . . . ” He closed with the suggestion that it was time “to season Miss Minor’s passage across the footlights with laughter.” The article never appeared in print, however. On May 27, Sedgwick announced to a staff meeting that the *Atlantic’s* lawyers had decided against any further publication on the subject.⁶²

About a month later, Teresa Fitzpatrick went out to California and succeeded where both Sedgwick and Armstrong had failed. That is, she persuaded Wilma to make and sign a statement that amounted to a weird confession. Dated July 3, 1929, it read in part:

I went to see Scott Greene and got his story and went home to Mama and said to her, Mama at last our faith of a lifetime has led to something. It has been given us for a divine purpose. On another plane those people (Lincoln and Ann and those other people) must exist. We have talked to many others, our family and close friends, and I said to Mama, Don’t you think I have earned the right to be the channel to tell that real story to the world? Mama said, I don’t know darling, we can try. Mama had always been the medium through whom the spirits had spoken. . . .

On the next opportunity a few days later I asked through my Mother, who at that time was in a trance, the guide—I believe it was my uncle who came, if I might have the divine privilege of being the instrument through whom the real story might come to the world. He answered he would find out and let me know the next week. The next week when Mother came again she went into her trance and the guide said he had asked the people (Lincoln, Ann, etc.) and they said they would give the story to me, provided I was willing to tie myself down to months and months of systematic labor. I agreed. I then began to prepare a series of questions. I would write out the questions. I would hand them to my Mother then in the trance; the spirit would come, whoever it might be, and fill out the answers. For instance, I would ask the ages of the two when Ann and Abe first met, and in the blank left under the question which was typewritten on a large sheet, the guide would answer through my Mother. . . .

Every word in Matilda Cameron's Diary is verbatim as given by the guide. Every word written through my Mother as the medium. All this continued for a long period, but we had to stop for three or four weeks as my Mother was threatened with blindness. By this time I went to her home frequently. She would phone me that a "message come through last night," and I would go to see her, and she would give me the message she had received in her handwriting. . . .

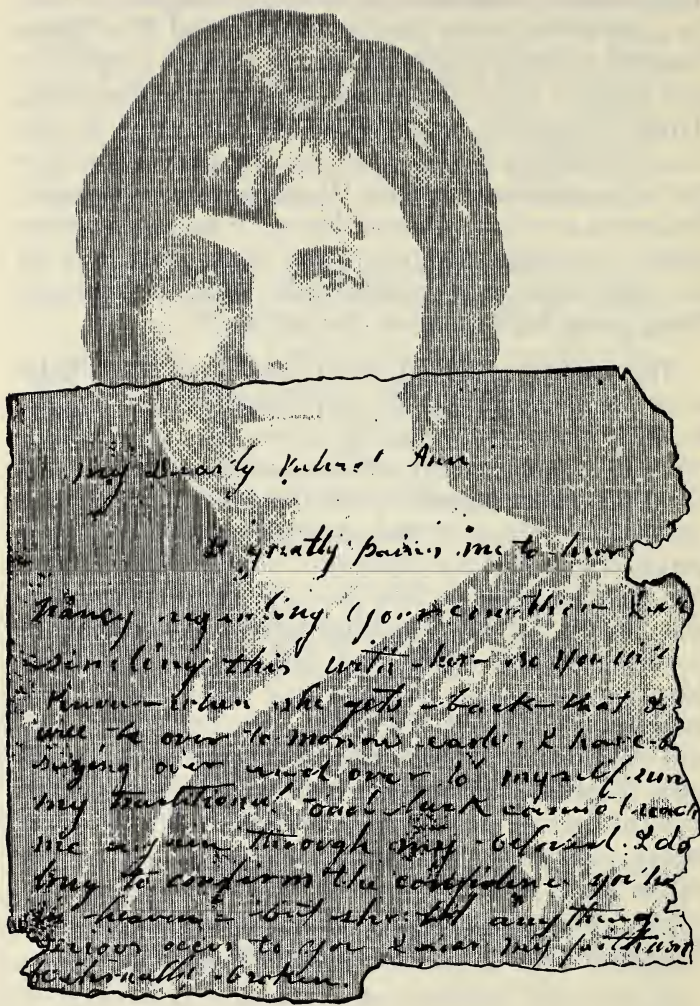
I asked where I would get the paper to write this on, the guide answered (oftentimes it would be Marie Corelli) that I could get it from old books and gave me a list of books that Lincoln used at that period of his life. I went to old bookshops and had no difficulty in picking them up. Then the guide told me for my continuity that I must look up written books for well known facts which were available to everyone. . . . Mr. Ashe told me about the Atlantic Contest and although I had offered it to Harpers, I wrote to the Atlantic offering it as original Lincoln letters. I would die on the gallows that the spirits of Ann and Abe were speaking through my Mother to me, so that my gifts as a writer combined with her gifts as a medium could hand in something worthwhile to the world.⁶³

Thus, as it turned out, Oliver Barrett had been amazingly accurate in his remark that the Minor letters were "like messages drawn from the spirit world by the intervention of 'mediums.'"

Even with this document in his possession, Sedgwick made no move to publicize what the *Atlantic* had learned about the forgery. He was advised and pestered to do so, especially by William E. Barton, who lectured him repeatedly on his duties as an editor. "Why not tell the truth," Barton urged, "and if it brings you a libel suit, accept it as under the circumstances perhaps no more than you deserve, and something you owe to the public."⁶⁴ But Sedgwick stubbornly maintained his silence, motivated not only by legal considerations but also by weariness and mortification. He wanted to hear no more about Wilma Frances Minor and her Lincoln collection. After Angle's critique, the *Atlantic* never printed another word on the subject. Wilma herself

disappeared quietly from public view. Sedgwick, when he came to write his autobiography titled *The Happy Profession* (1946), discussed Lincoln at some length but said nothing about the Minor affair. A few years later, Teresa Fitzpatrick arranged to tell the story in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, but she gave up the project at the request of Edward Weeks, who had succeeded Sedgwick as editor of the *Atlantic*. "I am not sensitive about the subject, but others are," Weeks said, "and for the time being it is probably the right and friendly thing for us both to draw the curtain."⁶⁵

The curtain remained drawn until long after Sedgwick's death in 1960 at the age of eighty-eight. At last, in 1973, Weeks published *My Green Age*, an autobiography of his early career, and he included an account of the Minor affair, together with the full text of Wilma's confession. Of course that confession provided only a partial solution of the mystery. It left unanswered certain questions that are now probably forever unanswerable. As for the Ann Rutledge legend, it has declined in credibility during the past half century. The latest biography of Lincoln suggests that there was nothing more than a platonic friendship between young Abe and Ann.⁶⁶ It is unlikely that we shall ever know for sure. Yet perhaps somewhere in a battered trunk pushed into the darkest recesses of an old attic there are documents—authentic documents—waiting to tell us the whole truth. And perhaps on the day they are discovered we shall receive a wistful message from Wilma Frances Minor, using Ellery Sedgwick as her guide.



Part of One of Abraham Lincoln's Letters to Ann Rutledge

My Dearly Valued Ann,

It greatly pains me to hear (from) Nancy regarding your condition. I am sending this with her so you will know when she gets back that I will be over tomorrow early. I have been saying over and over to myself (surely) my traditional bad luck cannot reach me again through my beloved. I do long to confirm the confidence you (have) in heaven—but should anything serious occur to you I fear my faith would be eternally broken.

NOTES

¹Holmes in A. Conan Doyle, *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927); Poirot in Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920); Wimsey in Dorothy Sayers, *Strange Body* (1923); Vance in S. S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright), *The Benson Murder Case* (1926); and Queen in Ellery Queen (Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee), *The Roman Shoe Mystery* (1929).

²Marjorie Nicolson, "The Professor and the Detective," *Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (April 1929): 492, 493. The essay is reprinted in Howard Haycraft, ed., *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), pp. 110-127.

³Wilma Frances Minor to Editor, *Atlantic Monthly*, June 27, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File on the Minor Collection, Boston, examined through the courtesy of Edward A. Weeks. Eugene F. Saxton of the Harper organization later complained that Miss Minor had broken an explicit written promise of "first offer magazine and book rights." Saxton to Minor, November 12 (telegram), and to Ellery Sedgwick, November 20, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁴Edward Weeks, *My Green Age* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press/Little, Brown and Company, 1973), p. 251; unsigned copy of telegram to Minor, July 3, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁵Frederick Lewis Allen, "Sedgwick and the Atlantic," *Outlook and Independent*, 150 (December 26, 1928): 1406-1408, 1417; Weeks, *My Green Age*, pp. 197, 204-205; Ellery Sedgwick, *The Happy Profession* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press/Little, Brown and Company, 1946), pp. 6, 297.

⁶Sedgwick, *Happy Profession*, p. 253.

⁷Minor to Sedgwick, August 29, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File, which also contains Miss Minor's manuscript in the original version and in a revised version.

⁸W. C. Giffing to Nelson J. Peabody, no date; Sedgwick to Minor, September 17, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Weeks, *My Green Age*, pp. 251-252.

⁹*Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (February 1929): 284; *San Diego Union*, January 3, 1929.

¹⁰Lincoln to Calhoun, May 19, 1848, original in *Atlantic Monthly* File; printed in *Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (February 1929): 221.

¹¹Weeks, *My Green Age*, p. 252; *Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (February 1929): 288d; Minor to Sedgwick, September 16, November 15, and to Teresa Fitzpatrick, October 20, 1928; Sedgwick to Minor, September 17, 21, October 25, November 9, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

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¹²Minor to Fitzpatrick, October 20, November 16, December 17, 1928; Fitzpatrick to Minor, November 1, December 14, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

¹³Minor to Paul M. Angle, January 24, 1929, Paul M. Angle Papers on the Lincoln Forgeries, Chicago Historical Society.

¹⁴Minor vita (undated, but probably written in November 1928); Minor to Fitzpatrick, November 16, 1928; J. B. Armstrong to Peabody, May 19, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

¹⁵San Diego *Union*, January 29, February 5, 26, April 15, November 18, December 9, 1928.

¹⁶Minor vita, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

¹⁷Brian Masters, *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter: The Extraordinary Life of Marie Corelli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 3.

¹⁸Minor to Sedgwick, August 29, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File. In her vita, Wilma called herself "a protégé of Marie Corelli."

¹⁹Minor revised manuscript; Sedgwick to Oliver Barrett, December 12, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

²⁰Charles Willis Thompson, reviewing Barton's *The Lineage of Lincoln*, New York *Times*, May 12, 1929. Benjamin P. Thomas, *Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and His Biographers* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1947), p. 242, calls Barton "a great historical detective."

²¹Barton to Sedgwick, September 6, 11, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Barton to Angle, December 8, 1928; May 1, 1929; to Georgia L. Osborne, December 3, 1928; Sedgwick to Barton, September 10, 1928, William E. Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

²²New York *Times*, December 2, 1928. According to Weeks, *My Green Age*, p. 254, "Ford was written off as an unbeliever." Writing to Angle, February 2, 1929, Angle Papers, Ford declared: "He [Sedgwick] may not have confidence in my judgment. That is his right. But he did ask my opinion of the papers and he was discourteous in not allowing me to see the originals after committing me to the photostats . . ."

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²³Sedgwick to Minor, September 21; to Barton, November 6, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

²⁴Ida N. Tarbell, *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924), pp. 211-224.

²⁵Sedgwick to Minor, October 11; to Norman Hapgood, November 6; to Barton, November 6, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File. Sedgwick saw Tarbell first on the afternoon of October 9. Sedgwick to Tarbell, October 8; Tarbell to Sedgwick (telegram and letter), October 19, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

²⁶Edward A. Weeks memorandum to Sedgwick, October 18, 1928; Sedgwick to Barton, November 6, 19; to Minor, October 11, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Putnam to Sedgwick, December 4, 1928, copy in Angle Papers; *Atlantic Monthly*, 142 (December 1928): 835, 836; 143 (February 1929): 288b-288c.

²⁷Weeks, *My Green Age*, p. 253; *Atlantic Monthly*, 142 (December 1928): 86-87 (advertisements).

²⁸Minor to Barton (telegram), November 6, 1928; Barton to Sedgwick, November 15, 1928, Barton Papers; Barton to Minor (copy), November 12, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

²⁹Barton to Sedgwick, November 15, 1928; to Angle, May 1, 1929, Barton Papers, which also contain the photostats with Barton's notation: "I do not believe these three alleged letters of Lincoln . . . are genuine." We have only Barton's word that he came to this conclusion on the train back from California.

³⁰*San Diego Union*, November 18, 1928; Marjorie Brown Wright to Angle, November 28, 1928, Angle Papers; Sedgwick to Minor, November 15; Minor to Sedgwick, November 20, 23, 26; Anderson Galleries to Minor, November 13, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

³¹Ford to Sedgwick, November 27; Sedgwick to Ford, November 28, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

³²Sedgwick to Barton, November 30, 1928, Barton Papers; Sedgwick to Minor, December 6; Sandburg to Sedgwick, dated November 25, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File. It seems likely that Sandburg's letter was written on December 29 and misdated; for the correspondence indicates that he did not see the documents until his Thanksgiving visit on November 28-29.

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³³Miers in his foreword to Paul M. Angle, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Autobiographical Writings* (Kingsport, Tenn.: privately printed, 1947), p. vi. On Angle generally, see Irving Dilliard, "Paul M. Angle: Warm Recollections and Clear Impressions," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 68 (November 1975): 435-443.

³⁴"Lincoln's First Love?" *Lincoln Centennial Association Bulletin*, number 9 (December 1, 1927); "Atlantic Monthly Lincoln Letters Spurious," *ibid.*, special bulletin (December 1, 1928); *Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (February 1929): 283. The *Philadelphia Record* also carried the story on November 27, its publisher being a friend of Logan Hay, president of the Centennial Association. J. David Stern to Hay, November 28; Angle to Sedgwick, December 4, 1928, Angle Papers.

³⁵*New York Times*, December 3, 1928; Barrett to Louis A. Warren, December 1, 1928, Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³⁶*Illinois State Register* (Springfield), November 28, 1928; Warren to Sedgwick, November 27; to *New York Times*, to Angle, and to Hewitt Howland, November 28; Townsend to Angle, November 28, 30, 1928, Warren Library. See the *Philadelphia Record*, November 28, December 2, 1928, for statements by Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach and George J. C. Grasberger, experts on manuscripts and autographs.

³⁷Signed statement by Joseph Benjamin Oakleaf, December 4, 1928, Angle Papers. The Librarian of Brown University, which had a large collection of Lincoln manuscripts, was equally emphatic: "It is not a question of seeing the originals. No photographic reproduction could ever have transformed a genuine Lincoln letter into what you show as a facsimile . . . I could tell across the room that that was not a Lincoln letter, just as I could tell a friend from a stranger." H. L. Koopman to Sedgwick, December 3, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

³⁸On this subject, see especially Angle, "Lincoln Letters Spurious," pp. 6-7.

³⁹*New York Times*, December 2; *Boston Herald*, December 4, 1928.

⁴⁰*New York Times*, December 5, 1928; *Boston Herald*, January 16, 1929; Tarbell to Angle, December 6; Putnam to Sedgwick (copy), December 4, 1928, Angle Papers.

⁴¹Barton to the *Atlantic Monthly*, December 5; to Sedgwick, December 8; to Minor, December 11, 1928, Barton Papers (copies) and *Atlantic Monthly* File. *Boston Herald*, December 10, 1928.

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⁴²Sedgwick to Barton, December 14; Minor to Barton, December 17, 26, 1928; January 10, 1929, Barton Papers; Fitzpatrick to Minor, December 14; Minor to Fitzpatrick, December 15, 17, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁴³Sedgwick to Minor, December 12; Minor to Sedgwick, December 18, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁴⁴Angle to Ford, December 14, [15]; to Barrett, December 14, [15]; to Wright, December [16]; Ford to Angle, December 17, 18, Angle Papers.

⁴⁵Wilma Frances Minor, "Lincoln the Lover: The Courtship," *Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (January 1929): 1-14; *Boston Herald*, December 23, 1928.

⁴⁶H. L. Koopman to Sedgwick, December 3, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁴⁷*New York Times*, December 23; *Boston Herald*, December 24, 30, 1928; Sedgwick to Minor, December 26, 27, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁴⁸Minor to Sedgwick, December 25, 26 (telegram), 27, 1928, *Atlantic Monthly* File; *San Diego Union*, January 3; *Emporia (Kans.) Gazette*, January 12; *Philadelphia Record*, January 14, 1929.

⁴⁹Sedgwick to Fitzpatrick (telegram), January 12; Fitzpatrick to Sedgwick, January 17, and to Barton, January 17, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Angle to Ford, January 16; to Captain James P. Murphy, January 16; to Fred H. Hand, January 16, 1929, Angle Papers; *Boston Herald*, January 12, 1929.

⁵⁰Fitzpatrick to Minor (telegram), December 31, 1928; to Sedgwick, January 17, 1929; DeBoyer to Fitzpatrick, January 2, 1929 (photostat), *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁵¹Angle to Hand, January 2; to Ferris Greenslet, January 10; to Peabody, January 17; Weeks to Angle (telegram), January 12; Peabody to Angle, January 16, 1929, Angle Papers.

⁵²Report of J. B. Armstrong Detective Service, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Murphy to Angle, December 29, 1928; Angle to Murphy, February 6; Angle to Ford, January 28, 1929, Angle Papers.

⁵³Minor to Sedgwick, February 8; to Fitzpatrick, February 8, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Angle to Ford, January 28, 1929, Angle Papers; *Boston Herald*, January 21, *New York Times*, January 22, 1929.

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⁵⁴*Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (1929): 283; Angle to Board of Directors, Lincoln Centennial Association, January 23; to Ford, January 23, 28; John E. Angle to Angle, January 23, 1929, Angle Papers.

⁵⁵Angle to Ford, January 28; to Sedgwick, February 8, 1929, Angle Papers; Weeks, *My Green Age*, p. 256; Paul M. Angle, "The Minor Collection: A Criticism," *Atlantic Monthly*, 143 (April, 1929): 516-525, reprinted in Robin W. Winks, ed., *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), pp. 127-141; and in Paul M. Angle, *On a Variety of Subjects* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society/Caxton Club, 1974), pp. 1-16.

⁵⁶Minor to Sedgwick, January 22, 23, February 8, 9 (telegram), March 12; to Little, Brown and Company, February 12, 1929; staff meeting minutes, May 27; Sedgwick memorandum, May 29, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁵⁷Armstrong himself said that he had been working 12 to 16 hours a day on the case. In May, he suffered a ruptured artery and was hospitalized. Armstrong to Peabody, April 13; Armstrong agency to Peabody, May 22, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁵⁸Armstrong agent report, April 1, 1929; undated memorandum of Weeks; Ashe to Sedgwick (telegram), March 28; Peabody to Ashe, April 15, 1929.

⁵⁹*Harvard Crimson* (Cambridge, Mass.), March 28, 1929.

⁶⁰Peabody to Armstrong, March 29 (telegram); Armstrong to Peabody, April 13, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File. Armstrong's report of the meeting runs to more than 20 single-spaced typewritten pages.

⁶¹Peabody to Armstrong, February 26, April 6 (letter and telegram), 1929; Peabody to Nelson Greene and vice versa (telegrams), April 24, 1929; Weeks, undated memorandum of his interview with Scott Greene; Angle to Sedgwick, February 5; Sedgwick to Hand, February 6, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File; Weeks, *My Green Age*, pp. 256-257.

⁶²The manuscript is in the *Atlantic Monthly* File. To William A. Bahlke, Sedgwick or a member of his staff wrote on June 2, 1929: "There are . . . certain further facts which we should like to give our public, but our lawyer tells us that for the present we ought not to print them in the *Atlantic*."

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⁶³There are several copies of this document in the *Atlantic Monthly* File, including one made by Teresa Fitzpatrick and signed by her as an "exact copy," but the original, bearing Wilma Frances Minor's signature and that of three witnesses, was presumably placed in the hands of the *Atlantic's* legal advisers and has not come to light. Writing to Alfred R. McIntyre of Little, Brown and Company on July 12, 1929, Sedgwick spoke of having "secured a signed and witnessed confession."

⁶⁴Barton to Sedgwick, May 6; to Theodore Morrison, May 11, 20, 21, 1929, *Atlantic Monthly* File.

⁶⁵Fitzpatrick to Weeks, September 7, 1950; February 21, 1952; Weeks to Fitzpatrick, September 13, 1950.

⁶⁶Weeks, *My Green Age*, pp. 257-259. Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 19.

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